

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

REQUIREMENT TO USE A TRAVEL MANAGEMENT CENTER (TMC)

I Are travelers required to use a Travel Management Center (TMC) when making reservations for common carrier transportation, lodging, and car rental?

Yes, according to Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), 301-73.102, effective January 1, 2001, travelers (includes travel arrangers) are required to use a TMC when making reservations for common carrier transportation, lodging, and car rental.

I Why are travelers required to use a TMC to make reservations for common carrier transportation, lodging, and car rental?

To implement the provisions of the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act, it is *mandatory* that travelers use SATO to make all of their reservations.

I Are there exceptions to the mandatory use of a TMC when making reservations for common carrier transportation, lodging, and car rental?

Yes. Below are examples of exceptions to the mandatory use of a TMC when making reservations for common carrier transportation, lodging, and car rental:

- 1) Lodging for conferences;
- 2) Lodging where travelers cannot plan where they will lodge from one night to the next; and
- 3) Rental car reservations where travelers cannot plan when they will rent a car from one night to the next.

SATO HOURS OF OPERATION/PHONE NUMBERS

I What TMC services NOAA?

On November 20, 2000, the Department of Commerce (DOC) awarded a contract for nationwide travel management services to SatoTravel (SATO). Under this nationwide contract, SATO will service travelers located in the United States and its possessions.

I Which SATO Office do travelers contact to make reservations?

Travelers located in:

1) the **Hoover Building in Washington, DC should contact the SATO Office in the Hoover Building.**

Phone number is (202) 482-1543/Fax number is (202) 482-0527.

2) the **Washington, DC metropolitan area should contact the SATO Office in Silver Spring, MD.**

Phone number is (301) 713-2407/Fax number is (301) 713-2226.

3) a **field location should contact SATO's Reservation Center, located in San Antonio, Texas.**

Phone number is 800-736-9899/Fax number is 877-905-9646.

I What are the hours of operation for SATO's Reservation Center in San Antonio, Texas?

Hours of operation at the Reservation Center are 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. local time for your geographical location.

I What is SATO's emergency after-hours phone number?

SATO's emergency after-hours phone number for all locations is 1-800-827-7777. The emergency number is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. During normal working hours (8:00 a.m.- 5:30 p.m.), travelers should call their servicing SATO Office when experiencing ticketing problems or when changes are necessary. After normal working hours, they should call the emergency number. Under emergency circumstances when a travel order cannot be issued prior to travel, employees are required to use their individual Government-issued Citibank travel charge card to pay for their tickets.

I What is SATO's phone number for hearing impaired assistance?

SATO's phone number for hearing impaired assistance is 800-726-7621.

I Where can travelers obtain SATO forms?

Travelers can obtain the Traveler Profile Form, and the Reservation Request Form, and access the Feedback Form, and On-Line Itinerary from the following SATO web-site (The travel web-site has a direct link to SATO's web-site):

www.satotravel.com/govtravelers/commerce.

I How does a traveler submit feedback information about SATO?

Travelers can submit feedback information about SATO by accessing SATO's web-site,

and click on “Feedback Form.” Information submitted through this process is forwarded to both SATO and the DOC. In addition, travelers will periodically be asked to participate in either a telephone or written survey. Travelers should take the time to participate in these surveys since their input will help to monitor and evaluate the quality of service being provided by SATO.

RESERVATION REQUIREMENTS

- I How can travelers expedite the reservation process?**

Travelers can expedite the reservation process by submitting completed profile forms to SATO. Profile forms include telephone number(s), fax number(s), e-mail address(es), office address, and personal preferences for seating and meal requests. Profile forms will expedite the reservation process because SATO will have permanent reservation information, and will not have to ask travelers for the same information each time.

■ **Where do travelers obtain SATO profile forms, and where do they send them when they are completed?**

Travelers can access the “Traveler Profile Form” on SATO’s web-site. When completed, the Traveler Profile Form can be faxed to SATO.

■ **What will SATO provide to ensure the accuracy of reservations?**

SATO will e-mail an itinerary to the traveler within 24 hours of the reservation (including multiple reservations). It is the travelers responsibility to verify the accuracy of the itinerary upon receipt. SATO should be notified immediately (or at least prior to ticketing) of any errors. Effective April, 2001, SATO has provided a dedicated agent to review each DOC reservation to ensure accuracy, i.e., lowest fares offered, preferred seating, correct e-mail addresses, etc.

■ **What is the most efficient way to handle multiple reservations?**

Travelers have the option of placing multiple reservations by phone, or by fax using the Reservation Request Form. To avoid unnecessary time on the phone, travelers are encouraged to use the Reservation Request Form which can be accessed through SATO’s web-site. To ensure uniformity, one SATO agent will be assigned to book all the reservations for the same trip.

■ **Are travelers required to provide SATO with social security numbers?**

No. Travelers are not required to provide SATO with social security numbers.

■ **Are SATO agents required to provide their names when making a reservation?**

Yes. SATO agents will provide their first names upon reservation. Itineraries and invoices show the agent’s “sine number”, or code number. Due to high call volumes, travelers who wish to make changes to reservations when calling the SATO Reservation Center may not be able to talk to the original agent who booked the reservation. Travelers who experience difficulties can ask for assistance from a SATO supervisor.

COMMON CARRIER REQUIREMENTS

■ **What is required from travelers before airline tickets will be issued?**

Travelers must fax travel orders and/or trip authorizations to their servicing SATO Office

as soon as they are approved, but no later than two to three business days prior to travel to ensure that airline tickets are issued. Travel orders may need to be faxed sooner for non-refundable or restricted fares. **SATO will not issue tickets without approved travel orders and/or trip authorizations.** It is important to include airline ticket cost (or best estimate), departure airport, and arrival airport on all travel orders. Blanket travel orders must accompany all trip authorizations faxed to SATO.

■ **What is required from travelers to ensure that airline tickets are charged to the correct accounting classification code?**

Travelers must include an accounting classification code in either:

- 1) Block 7 of the Travel Manager authorization default form, or
- 2) Block 9 of the Form CD-29, Travel Order, or
- 3) “Financial Data” field of the NOAA Form 42-5, Trip Authorization.

Travelers must include either a complete FIMA or CAMS accounting classification code. If FIMA accounting classification codes are used, they should be 15 digits long and in the following format:

Fiscal year: 1 position

Organization code: 6 positions

Task code: 6 positions

Phase code: 2 positions (must be entered even if 00)

■ **Are tickets issued when reservations are made?**

No. Tickets are not issued when reservations are made. Contract carrier E-tickets will be issued 2 - 3 days prior to travel. Depending on airline requirements, non-refundable or restricted E-tickets could be issued sooner. Hard copy tickets can either be express mailed five days prior to travel, or sent via regular mail 14 days prior to travel. A waiver form must be signed by the traveler when tickets are sent regular mail. The waiver form indicates that SATO is not responsible for tickets that are not received in a timely fashion.

■ **How will travelers know they’ve been ticketed?**

SATO will e-mail an invoice (invoice is a term used by SATO and it denotes a receipt, not a bill, to the traveler) to the traveler **after the ticket has been issued**. It is extremely important to contact SATO when an invoice has not been received, since this may indicate that the traveler will not have a ticket waiting for them upon arrival at the airport. BEWARE: Faxing travel orders to SATO way ahead of travel will not generate an invoice any sooner since invoices are **only generated at the time of ticketing**.

■ **Will Citibank account numbers be referenced on invoices?**

Invoices sent via the internet will reference the first six and last four digits of the Citibank account number. Invoices sent via fax machines will reference the entire Citibank account number.

■ **What can travelers do when there is no ticket waiting for them at the airport?**

During normal working hours, travelers are expected to call their servicing SATO office when there is no ticket waiting for them at the airport. After normal working hours, travelers should call SATO's emergency number (1-800-827-7777) which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

I Will travelers receive electronic tickets (e-tickets) or paper tickets?

All tickets for domestic travel will be issued as e-tickets and all tickets for international travel will be issued as paper tickets. Paper tickets can be issued in the event of a possible airline strike. Currently, the four major airlines that may or may not strike, are:
American Airlines (AA)
Delta Airlines (DL)
Northwest Airlines (NW)
United Airlines (UA)

I How does a traveler exchange an e-ticket at the airport?

The traveler should request the original airline to issue a paper ticket to be exchanged at the ticket counter of the new airline when it becomes necessary to exchange an e-ticket at the airport.

I Is SATO required to arrange seat assignments?

Yes. SATO is required to arrange seat assignments when possible. Seat assignments may not always be available since airlines will typically block seats for frequent flyer account holders or airport check-in (usually available two hours before departure time).

I How does SATO handle frequent flyer accounts?

SATO will reference the traveler's frequent flyer account number obtained from the profile in the reservation sent to the airlines. The airlines are responsible for aggregating and/or using frequent flyer miles. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure frequent flyer accounts are maintained correctly, and to use frequent flyer miles earned on official travel for official travel. Note: The name on the frequent flyer account must be an exact match to the name booked in the reservation.

I What approval is required to upgrade a common carrier ticket?

An approved CD-334, Request for Approval of Extra Fare Air Accommodations, must be provided to SATO **before** any premium-class tickets can be issued. Use of premium-class accommodations shall only be authorized and approved following the guidelines contained in the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), 301-10.124.

I What approval is required to use foreign carriers?

Travelers are required to use U.S. flag air carriers for all air travel funded by the Government unless one of the exceptions contained in the FTR, 301-10.135 through 301-10.138 can be met. A written justification for use of a foreign-flag carrier must be provided to SATO anytime a foreign carrier is used. The Government will not pay foreign carrier airfare without a written justification which addresses one or more of the

exceptions contained in the FTR.

I What approvals are required to use non-contract fares (discounted Government fares) and/or non-refundable fares (restricted fares)?

1) Travel orders must include a justification for the use of non-contract carriers. The list of justifications is contained in FTR, 301-10.107.

2) Travel orders must include the following statement when using a non-refundable fare: “It is acknowledged that officials and travelers have been made aware of the cancellation/change fee imposed with the use of discount fares.” to ensure that travelers and approving officials are aware of the cancellation/change fees imposed by the airlines if the travel is canceled, interrupted, or the itinerary is changed.

3) Whenever a traveler uses non-refundable fares, SATO will require the traveler to sign a waiver form indicating that the traveler is aware they’ve been offered a non-refundable fare and that there may be penalty fees charged. The waiver form will be sent to the traveler the same time the itinerary is sent, and must be signed and returned to SATO immediately.

Travel orders may need to be faxed to SATO immediately in order to secure a non-refundable fare.

I What is required of a traveler when a trip is canceled?

Travelers must notify SATO when reservations are canceled, and return any unused hard copy tickets to their servicing SATO Office.

I What is the ticket refund process?

SATO forwards the unused paper tickets weekly, along with applicable paperwork required by the Airline Reporting Corporation (ARC), to a clearing house for processing to the bank and airline. When electronic tickets are issued, SATO will print the unused ticket, and follow the same procedures as a paper ticket. The credit amount of the ticket should be reflected on the next billing statement the traveler or finance (depending on if the ticket was charged to a centrally-billed account or the employee’s individual Government Citibank travel card) receives from the bank. The refund may take six to eight weeks depending on the billing cycle.

COMMON CARRIER TICKET CHARGES

I How are common carrier transportation tickets charged?

Generally, common carrier transportation tickets are charged to NOAA’s centrally-billed account (CBA) unless SATO is otherwise directed to use the employee’s individual Government Citibank travel card. SATO will not accept personal credit cards or cash to pay for official tickets.

- **Can one airline ticket be charged to multiple accounting codes?**
No. One airline ticket cannot be charged to multiple accounting codes.
- **Are there any fees charged for the issuance of airline tickets?**
Yes. SATO will charge a transaction fee for both domestic and foreign tickets (paper or electronic). SATO's Reservation Center in San Antonio, Texas will charge a slightly lower transaction fee. In addition, airlines will charge certain taxes. For the amount of the fees, contact your servicing SATO office.
- **Are there any fees charged when changes are made to a reservation?**
There are no charges when reservations are made or changed prior to ticketing. However, charges are incurred for changes after the ticket is issued. Therefore, travelers should ensure that travel plans are firm before requesting that tickets be issued.
- **Are there any ticket delivery fees?**
Yes. SATO will charge an overnight mail delivery fee for each paper ticket that is issued. There are no delivery fees charged by the SATO Offices in Silver Spring, Maryland and the Hoover Building in Washington, D.C.
- **How are transaction and delivery fees charged?**
Transaction and delivery fees are charged to the same form of payment and the same accounting as common carrier tickets.

AIRFARE INFORMATION

- **What is the difference between a contract fare and a non-contract fare (discounted government fares?)**
Each fiscal year, the GSA awards contracts to airlines in the specific city pair markets in which they fly. Although one airline may be awarded the contract city pair in a particular market, the other airlines that service that particular market will usually match the contract carriers' fare with a non-contract fare.

Contract fares ensure last seat availability, and are guaranteed for the entire fiscal year.

Non-contract fares are capacity controlled, i.e., the airlines only offer so many seats at this fare level, and may increase at any time. In addition, airlines can change or add restrictions to non-contract fares. For example, some airlines have placed restrictions on the dates of travel. Northwest no longer allows travel on Sundays on some of their non-contract Government fares. The airlines have implemented these changes to control low fares in high volume markets.

■ **What is the difference between a non-contract fare and a non-refundable fare?**

Non-contract and non-refundable fares are both capacity controlled fares that may increase at any time. In addition, the restrictions for these fares can change at any time. Non-contract fares, unlike non-refundable fares, are offered to Government employees only, and are paid for by a Government credit card. Non-refundable fares are offered to the general public.

■ **How can travelers verify which airlines were awarded contract carriers ?**

Travelers can verify which airlines were awarded contract carriers by accessing “Links for Government Travelers” through SATO’s web-site which is a direct link to the General Services Administration (GSA) web-site. Only contract carriers are listed at this site.

■ **Are travelers personally responsible for cancellation/change fees imposed by the airlines for non-refundable tickets?**

When travel is cancelled/changed for personal reasons, the traveler is responsible for the cancellation/change fee and when travel is cancelled/changed for official reasons, the Government is responsible for the fee.

LODGING/RENTAL CAR REQUIREMENTS

■ **How are lodging and rental car reservations charged?**

Lodging and rental car charges are paid directly to the vendor with the employee’s individual Government Citibank travel card upon check out or car return.

■ **Is SATO required to reserve lodging at the Government rate?**

No. It is the travelers responsibility to know what the Government lodging rate is, and to

ensure that SATO reserves lodging at the Government rate.

- **Are there any fees charged when only hotel and/or car rental reservation are made?**
No fees will be charged when **only** hotel and/or car rental reservations are made.

- **Are there any fees charged when dropping off a rental car to a location that is different than where the traveler originally picked up the car?**
Yes. Car rental companies may charge a drop fee and/or mileage charge in addition to their daily rental car rate. However, travelers may be able to avoid drop fees and/or mileage charges by informing SATO **upon reservation** that they will be dropping off the rental car to a location that is different than where they originally picked up the car.

- **Do travelers notify SATO when changing or cancelling hotel and/or car rental reservations?**
Yes. Travelers **must** notify SATO when changing or canceling hotel and/or car rental reservations. Hotel reservations are guaranteed to the traveler's Government issued charge card at the time of booking. If the hotel reservation is not canceled in the time frame specified by the hotel, the hotel may charge a no-show fee to the traveler's Government issued charge card. Some hotels are charging early check-out fees.